

# Third World Citizens and the Information Technology Revolution

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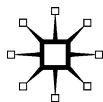
*Third World Citizens and the Information Technology Revolution*

by Nivien Saleh

# Third World Citizens and the Information Technology Revolution

*Nivien Saleh*

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THIRD WORLD CITIZENS AND THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY REVOLUTION

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*For my parents Abdel Halim Saleh and Elfriede Saleh, and  
for my brother Tilman*

# Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	xi
<i>List of Acronyms</i>	xiii
<i>Preface</i>	xvii
Chapter 1 A Human Rights Approach to Globalization	1
Inside the Giant Globe	1
Turning the Globe	3
Meet a Nineteen-Year-Old Egyptian	4
Ways of Looking at Information Technology	6
Embarking on a Dissertation	8
From Fordism to Flexible Accumulation	9
The IT Revolution from a Post-Marxist Perspective	11
The Social Construction of the IT Revolution	12
On Regime Theory	15
Transformation of the State	16
Autonomy	17
Measuring Respect for Autonomy	18
Looking Ahead	20
<b>Part I The Rules of the Game are Forged</b>	
Chapter 2 Telephony for the Global Economy	27
Telecom under Fordism	29
Change is in the Air	32
Who Wants How Much Competition?	35
A European Telecom Infrastructure that Meets Business Needs	36

	The European Union Enters the Race for Competitiveness	39
	Deepening Flexible Accumulation at the Uruguay Round	40
	The Emerging IT Regime and its Organizations In a Nutshell	49
Chapter 3	Introducing the Internet	55
	What is the Internet?	56
	Three Major Phases of Codification	57
	Areas of Internet Governance	68
	Summary: New Rules Enter the IT Regime	76
<b>Part II The Rules of the Game are Enforced</b>		
Chapter 4	Bringing Poor Economies in Line	81
	A Fragile System	83
	The IT Regime: Fuzzy at the Fringes	85
	Rules Give Rise to Roles	87
	The Peripheral State	87
	How Enforcement Mechanisms Impose Roles	91
	Ideology	93
	An Intricate Division of Labor	95
	Why Role Compliance is Rarely Complete	96
	How Does One Study Role Compliance?	97
	Investigating One Case but Learning about Many	99
Chapter 5	Egypt in the World Economy	101
	The State under Nasser	104
	Sadat's Reign: Egypt is Isolated and Indebted	109
	Mubarak until 1991: No More Bold Strategies	114
Chapter 6	Creditors Close In	121
	The First Three Enforcement Mechanisms Summarized	122
	Egypt Undergoes Structural Adjustment (Mechanism One)	125
	The European Union Seeks an Association Agreement (Mechanism Two)	127
	The Globalization Elite Gains Influence (Mechanism Three)	130
	And Autonomy?	137
	Conclusion	142

Chapter 7	The Telecom Monopolist	143
	Egypt's Telecom Sector: A Model of Mismanagement	145
	USAID Calls for Reform (Mechanism Four)	147
	The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Offers Assistance (Mechanism Five)	156
	The State Commits Itself to Export-Led Growth	157
	The Globalization Elite Demands Liberalization (Mechanism Three Revisited)	158
	Now It's Moving	159
Chapter 8	Egypt's IT Stakeholders	165
	Hisham El Sherif Visits the United States	166
	Back in Egypt	168
	Sherif Founds the Information and Decision Support Center	169
	Building a Support Network	170
	Helping the State Understand its Debt	171
	Giving the State Access to the Countryside	172
	CAPMAS, the "Big Black Hole"	173
	Outreach to International Peers	174
	Core Actors Support the IT Stakeholders (Causal Power Six)	175
	Egypt Gets its Internet Connection	183
	Political Alliances are Consolidated	184
	Mubarak Takes IT Policy Seriously (Mechanism Six)	185
Chapter 9	A New Ministry for an Old Country	187
	The President Gives a Speech	188
	How is the Speech to Be Interpreted?	189
	A Ministry is Born	191
	What Does It All Mean?	193
	Conclusion	205

### Part III Lessons

Chapter 10	Inferences from the Egyptian Case	209
	What Inferences Can a Single Case Yield?	211
	The Background Factor	213
	Enforcement Mechanism One: Structural Adjustment	213
	Enforcement Mechanism Two: The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership	218



	Enforcement Mechanism Three: The Globalization Elite	220
	Enforcement Mechanism Four: USAID and Telecom Reform	221
	Enforcement Mechanism Five: The EU Supports Sector Reform	222
	Enforcement Mechanism Six: The IT Stakeholders	223
	Unexamined Enforcement Mechanisms	227
	Conclusion	228
Chapter 11	Epilogue	229
	A World Full of Enforcement Mechanisms	229
	Why is There So Little Resistance to Corporate Globalization?	230
	What is To Be Done?	231
	<i>Notes</i>	235
	<i>Works Cited</i>	241
	<i>Index</i>	261

# Illustrations

## *Figures*

2.1	An international circuit.	30
10.1	The type “state presiding over a low or middle income economy” depicted as a fuzzy set.	214

## *Tables*

3.1	Members of the Global Business Dialogue on Electronic Commerce (GBDe) and the Internet Law and Policy Forum (ILPF)	71
5.1	U.S. assistance to Egypt, 1980–2000	113
6.1	Trade flows between the EU and eight Southern Mediterranean countries in 1994	129
6.2	Members of Egypt’s globalization elite	136
7.1	The two Egyptian cellular operators from February to April 1998	162
8.1	Select IDSC personnel with doctoral degrees and their educational affiliations	170
9.1	Egypt’s IT indicators over the years	202
10.2	Signature and entry into force of the Euro-Mediterranean association agreements	219

# Acronyms

AFESD	Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development
ARENTO	Arab Republic of Egypt National Telecommunication Organization
ARPA	Advanced Research Projects Agency
AT&T	American Telephone and Telegraph
BBN	Bolt, Beranek and Newman
BTA	Basic Telecom Agreement
ccTLD	country-code top-level domain
CSI	Coalition of Service Industries
CSNet	Computer Science Net
DCA	Defense Communications Agency
DNS	domain name system
EARN	European Academic Research Network
EC	European Community
ECES	Egyptian Center for Economic Studies
ECMS	Egyptian Company for Mobile Communications
EIEF	Egypt's International Economic Forum
ETUF	Egyptian Trade Union Federation
EU	European Union
EUN	Egyptian Universities Network
FCC	Federal Communications Commission
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GBDe	Global Business Dialogue on Electronic Commerce
GDLC	Global Distance Learning Center
GDP	gross domestic product
GIIC	Global Information Infrastructure Commission
GNI	gross national income

gTLD	generic top-level domain
IAB	Internet Activities Board
ICANN	Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers
IDSC	Information and Decision Support Center for the Egyptian Cabinet
IESG	Internet Engineering Steering Group
IETF	Internet Engineering Task Force
IIPA	International Intellectual Property Alliance
ILPF	Internet Law and Policy Forum
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IP	Internet protocol
IPR	intellectual property rights
ISE	Internet Society of Egypt
ISI	industrialization through import substitution
ISP	Internet service provider
IT	information technology
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
MCIT	Ministry of Communications and Information Technologies
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MoT	Ministry of Transport and Communication
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NSF	National Science Foundation
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PPP	purchasing power parity
PTT	post, telephone and telegraph
RFC	request for comments
RITSEC	Regional Information Technology and Software Engineering Center
TCP	Transport control protocol
TCP/IP	transport control protocol/Internet protocol
TNC	transnational corporation
TRA	Telecom Regulatory Authority
TRIPS	Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
UK	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
UNCITRAL	United Nations Conference on International Trade Law
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USIPO	U.S. Investment Promotion Office
USIS	U. S. Information Service
W3C	World Wide Web Consortium
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

# Preface

Does the information technology (IT) revolution empower Third World citizens? If you answered “yes,” you are in good company.

Most development experts and academics and most U.S. and European government officials sincerely believe that the IT revolution has brought enormous, unmitigated benefits to the people of the Third World.

Consolidating six years of research, this book challenges that consensus. It shows that First World governments and transnational corporations dominated the rule-making processes of the IT revolution. With this, they boosted their own economic competitiveness as they moved from the rigid production patterns of Fordism to flexible accumulation, emphasizing corporate mobility, organizational decentralization, and outsourcing.

After forging a new IT regime for themselves, these actors imposed it on Third World societies.

Examining how this process took place inside one Third World country, Egypt, this work documents how the World Bank, the European Commission, the U.S. government, and transnational corporations reconfigured power relations within poor economies with the allurements of technology and how they reinforced social injustice by denying ordinary citizens the right to choose their own political institutions. The book’s analysis shatters the myth that the new technologies significantly diminish economic hierarchies.

The present study is written from the vantage point of critical realism, a philosophy of social science that specifically searches for power relationships and the play of power. Critical realism is vibrant in European academia but is still largely unknown in the United States, where positivism prevails. It is a premise of this book that positivism blinds scholars and policymakers to the destructive effects of First World power on human autonomy in low-income societies.

In sum, *Third World Citizens and the Information Technology Revolution* shows what happens when repressive Third World elites enrich themselves in

cooperation with European and American corporations and governments. For those who wonder why some people in the world's periphery become attracted to violent oppositional visions, such as radical Islam, this study may be an eye-opener.

This analysis has been a long time in the making. The preliminary investigations began in 1999, when I was a PhD student at American University in Washington, DC, and scoured the field of comparative politics for a suitable dissertation topic. As every doctoral candidate knows, dissertation advisors exert strong influence over their students and often put their own mark on the works they supervise. I was lucky in that regard. As chair of my dissertation committee, Diane Singerman allowed me to truly follow my own intellectual inclinations while giving me the guidance I needed. Without her support, my work could not have become what it is today.

Edward Comor, who served on the dissertation committee until his return to Canada introduced me to the work of Gramscian international political economists, several of whom were affiliated with his alma mater, York University. Jon Anderson of the Catholic University of America contributed his expertise on information technology in the Middle East, read my chapters with a critical eye, and provided excellent substantive suggestions. Mireya Solis joined the committee after Edward's departure and helped me carry my dissertation to a successful defense.

Thanks are also due to over thirty policy experts in Washington, New York, and Cairo, who contributed their time and expertise by granting me in-depth interviews that complemented my archival research in the United States and Egypt, as well as the participant observations in Egypt.

Generally, I benefited from the heavy technology focus that prevailed at American University during my time as a graduate student there, and that manifested itself in faculty hires, technology-focused courses, and strong IT support for members of the campus community. I had the opportunity to work with Erran Carmel, an expert on the management of global information technology who taught me invaluable lessons about the economics of outsourcing business services. By offering me a position at the Social Science Research Lab, where I assisted students with their statistical research, maintained hard and software, and supported distance learning courses, Assen Assenov and Professor James Lee enabled me to acquire a very practical understanding of IT.

While I wrote up my results, my friends Tony Payan—now a professor at the University of Texas in El Paso—and Ayşegül Ateş—now a professor at Akdeniz University in Antalya—lived with me through the up and downs of writing a dissertation. So did Else Ward and John Hounsell of Washington, DC.

Over the last few years I have learned that writing an academic book is like a sculpture. You begin with a block of stone—the data you have gathered—and work to move it closer to the perfect shape that forms your vision. If you are an inexperienced sculptor—and I was—that vision itself evolves as you interact with your raw material. After weeks of labor, a figure emerges. You marvel at the progress you have made, see perfection in your sculpture, and put down your tools, afraid that further manipulation diminishes the beauty of what you have created. You then invite others to admire your creativity. If they are good friends, they will praise your effort but realize that your figure can be strengthened in its size, proportions, detail, or character, and tell you so.

I had many persons who did this for me by reading and commenting on my work: Mark Brawley of McGill University, Peter Katzenstein of Cornell University, Sheryl Lutjens, Cathy Small, Jacqueline Vaughn, Astrid Sheil, David Schlosberg, Zach Smith, Chris Gunn, and Susan Nyoka of Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, where I worked as a visiting professor, Sandy Thatcher of Pennsylvania State University, and Elisabeth Muhlenberg, a doctoral candidate at the University of Illinois in Chicago and dear friend.

Since 2007 I have been an assistant professor at the Center for International Studies at the University of St. Thomas in Houston. My colleagues at the University—and especially the Center—have given me an intellectual home that allowed me to improve my manuscript. It saddens me that Gustavo Wensjoe, the director of the Center for International Studies and a wonderful, hospitable spirit, passed away a year ago in an accident. He would have been very proud of this book.

I met Jimmy Engineer, Pakistan's national artist, at an interfaith dialogue at the University of St. Thomas. Ever since our first encounter he has kept in touch, calling from Dubai, Karachi, or Berlin, to inquire into my progress. Amit Kumar, my Indian friend who works for the United Nations, has done the same.

Two persons remain to be named: Sandy Sheehy, a seasoned journalist and friend, helped me by suggesting edits to the manuscript that improved its flow. Terry O'Rourke, a creative attorney from Houston and adjunct professor of international studies at the University of St. Thomas, has read each chapter with enthusiasm and a sharpened pen. For this and the sketches that he has contributed to this book I am truly grateful.

I now place the sculpture on which I have worked for so long in your hands.